

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 29, 2004

COASTAL FISHERY HABITAT INVENTORY

File No. 03-167

Project Manager: Michael Bowen

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration to prepare the Central and South Coast Fishery Habitat Inventory, a digital database of information pertaining to stream habitat conditions, presence of barriers to fish passage, and other data sources critical for use in the development of strategic salmonid recovery projects throughout the Central and South Coast regions, including the Counties of Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego.

LOCATION: Coastal watersheds throughout the Central and South Coast Area

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Consistency with Specific County
Local Coastal Program Policies

Exhibit 2: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following Resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code:

"The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed two hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000) to the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration ("CEMAR") for the preparation of the Central and South Coast Fishery Habitat Inventory ("Inventory"), subject to the condition that prior to commencement of work, CEMAR shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, schedule for completion and project budget, and the names and qualifications of any contractors to be employed in the preparation of the Inventory."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapter 6 (Sections 31251-31270) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding the enhancement of coastal resources.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 25, 2001.
 3. The Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends authorization to disburse up to \$250,000 to the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration (CEMAR) to inventory, scan, and convert to readily accessible, electronic format information pertaining to stream habitat conditions, presence of barriers to fish passage, and other data sources critical to the development of strategic salmonid recovery projects throughout the Central and South Coast regions, including the Counties of Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego. The end result of this process will be the Central and South Coast Fishery Habitat Inventory.

The purpose of this authorization is to enable CEMAR to compile and make readily accessible for public review all known stream surveys, habitat typing reports, barrier inventories, and other sources of information critical to the strategic development of habitat improvement projects. Doing so will help CEMAR and its partners, including public and private sector organizations, to precisely target and initiate the improvement of habitat and fish passage in streams where land use practices or the inappropriate design and construction of road crossings has degraded habitat beyond its ability to support native anadromous salmonid populations at sustainable levels.

Much historic and current habitat data exists, but is stored in hard copy frequently in home or regional offices of the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) or other local or State agencies. Despite the willingness of public agency staff to collaborate and share this data, staff resources and format of the data preclude the practical exchange of information between sister agencies or the general public. Moreover, accessible information is not archived in a fashion that ensures future availability.

Significant investments in the recovery of salmon and steelhead populations have been made by public and private organizations, often with great benefit to natural resources, but these investments would be better informed and of greater potential benefit to natural resources if based on historic and current stream habitat data, including inventories of barriers to fish passage. The ability of funders and local public entities to implement strategic fishery restoration projects has been somewhat limited by the unavailability of centrally and conveniently located data relating to watersheds targeted for restoration work. This proposal will provide funders and project proponents both with a rich and comprehensible data source that will assist the strategic selection of fishery habitat restoration projects and with the identification of appropriate restoration objectives for individual watersheds.

If this authorization is approved, CEMAR will research existing public agency files, review documents for content, and convert the documents and data to readily accessible electronic format. CEMAR staff will then provide recommendations for watersheds appearing to be likely priorities for restoration actions.

CEMAR, a nonprofit organization whose primary purpose is the strategic restoration of aquatic and riparian habitat, has previously undertaken work of this type in the San Francisco Bay Area, where it launched a restoration prioritization process for Bay watersheds. CEMAR now proposes to extend that effort to the Central and South Coast regions.

Site Description: Data collection will be limited to coastal anadromous fish-bearing streams in the Central and South Coast regions.

Project History: Last year, in response to an appropriation from the Salmon Habitat Restoration Program, sponsored by Senator Byron Sher (Palo Alto), the Conservancy conducted an extensive review of existing fish passage barrier data for coastal California. In this report, primarily conducted through environmental services contracts, the Conservancy identified a number of known barriers to fish passage in the Central and South Coast regions.

In addition to identifying more than 16,000 potential barriers to fish passage, the authors of the report learned that a great wealth of data relating to fish habitat conditions, including the presence of previously unknown barriers to fish passage, existed in DFG files, and elsewhere, but remained relatively inaccessible due to the data format and location. This obstacle makes data consolidation and watershed restoration project prioritization most difficult. Moreover, due to drastic staff curtailments and office transitions at DFG and elsewhere, much of the data is in danger of being made even less accessible, by virtue of its being boxed and shipped to a remote warehouse for storage and possible disposal. If approved, this authorization would enable CEMAR to permanently archive and make available data for watershed analysis, project prioritization, and implementation of strategic recovery projects.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$250,000
Resources Legacy Fund Foundation	185,000
N.O.A.A. Fisheries	<u>10,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$445,000

Funding for the proposed project is expected to come from the Conservancy's FY 2001/02 appropriation from the Safe Neighborhood, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Fund (Proposition 12) designated for salmon habitat recovery. The proposed project is consistent with this funding source and with Proposition 12 because it will further the restoration of salmonid habitat in Central and Southern California.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project is undertaken pursuant to Chapter 6 of Division 21, Sections 31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code, as follows:

In general, under §31111, the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations to prepare plans and feasibility studies. The proposed project, which involves the compilation of data

for watershed enhancement projects, is the first, necessary step in preparing a credible enhancement plan for these regions.

Pursuant to §31251, the Conservancy may award grants to nonprofit organizations for the purpose of enhancement of coastal resources which, because of human-induced events, or incompatible land uses, have suffered loss of natural and scenic values. Consistent with this Section, the proposed project provides funds to CEMAR to conduct data collection necessary to prepare enhancement plans for coastal fishery resources disturbed by human activities and incompatible land uses.

Section 31251.2 (a) provides that “[i]n order to enhance the natural or scenic character of coastal resources within the coastal zone, the Conservancy may undertake a project or award a grant...to enhance a watershed resource that is partly outside of the coastal zone. . . .” Consistent with this Section, the proposed project will serve to forward enhancement of salmonid habitat in locales that may be located outside the coastal zone. Nonetheless, the proposed project as a whole will expedite restoration of coastal zone resources and that will benefit the anadromous fish that rely on both the coastal and upstream habitats for their survival.

As required by §31252 the proposed project will focus on coastal anadromous salmonid habitat specifically identified in the pertinent certified local coastal plans as being in need of enhancement and restoration. Moreover, the project as a whole is consistent with those local plans, as discussed in detail in Exhibit 1.

Finally, pursuant to §31253, “(the) Conservancy may provide up to the total of the cost of any coastal resource enhancement project. . . .” and the amount of the Conservancy contribution shall be determined only after an assessment of funding generally available and other factors. The proposed contribution by the Conservancy was determined based on application of priority criteria and after taking into account other available resources and the matching contributions to the project by other funding sources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective A** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project will contribute to the development of approximately 70 plans and projects that will preserve and restore coastal watersheds and create river parkways.

Consistent with **Goal 6 Objective A**, the proposed project will leverage the results of the recently completed study of barriers to fish passage, through the implementation of projects to improve habitat for anadromous fish. The proposed authorization will enable the grantee and other organizations to prepare plans to increase and improve available habitat for aquatic species, notably salmon, by removing instream barriers to their free migration. By employing the Conservancy's recently completed report, “An Inventory of Barriers to Fish Passage in California's Coastal Watersheds,” as well as the expertise of the grantee, the Conservancy will ensure measurable increases in available habitat and, presumably, measurable increases in anadromous fish populations within and above the project areas.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** Supporters of this project include N.O.A.A. Fisheries, the California Department of Fish and Game, The Nature Conservancy, California Trout, Trout Unlimited, and others. Letters of support are included in Exhibit 2.
4. **Location:** The proposed project will include data review and assimilation for projects within and outside of the coastal zone. In either case, the proposed project will provide the information needed for strategic habitat improvement efforts within coastal watersheds for anadromous fish and other aquatic resources, and thereby benefit species that rely on both coastal and upstream habitats for their survival.
5. **Need:** The Central and South Coast regions, while not especially rich in anadromous fish resources, contain remnant populations of the endangered Coho salmon and steelhead, now listed in the South Coast as Endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act, and threatened in the Central Coast. Habitat limitations, such as barriers to fish passage, inadequate riparian canopy, embeddedness of stream bottoms, inadequate instream flows, and other factors obstruct recovery within the full geographic range of species either listed or potentially listed under the federal and State endangered species acts. The authorization will help prepare for the improvement of instream habitat and will substantially increase recovery efforts for these important fishery resources by preparing information and analysis necessary to the development of projects to provide anadromous salmonids and other aquatic organisms with access to high quality spawning and rearing sites throughout priority watersheds.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The public-trust value of California's salmon and steelhead populations is of great interest to all, and is a natural legacy too precious to lose. Moreover, the historic economic contributions from sport and commercial fishing can and must be recovered for the overall economic benefit of the State of California.

Additional Criteria

7. **Urgency:** Recovery of salmon and steelhead populations listed under the federal or State Endangered Species Acts will only occur if the concerted and strategic improvement of instream habitat, and subsequent recolonization of historic range, proceeds expeditiously. Extensive information regarding the historic and current condition of the habitat and range of species for anadromous salmonids exists, but is difficult to access and analyze for the purpose of recovery planning. Moreover, much of this information, frequently on file at home office locations and elsewhere, is, due to the current budget crisis, at risk of being transferred

to remote locations for long-term storage, and possible eventual disposal. CEMAR will work quickly and efficiently in order to adequately archive this information, thereby making it accessible for informed regional recovery planning and habitat enhancement efforts. Lastly, as populations of anadromous salmonids decline statewide, the need is urgent to recover populations by widening the available range of the species by restoring historically accessible habitat. Given extremely low levels of coho populations, perhaps as low as 2,000 adults statewide, there is an urgent demand for projects such as this.

9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
11. **Innovation:** This novel approach to data analysis and distribution is cost effective, and utilizes already collected, but relatively unavailable data, thereby precluding the need for high additional expenses associated with conducting new habitat surveys, watershed assessments, or other field examinations.
12. **Readiness:** The project applicant has demonstrated that it has the agency support and technical expertise necessary to commence and complete the project planning in a timely fashion. The work is expected to be completed within one year.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** The Conservancy’s completion of the report “Assessment of Barriers to Fish Passage in California’s Coastal Watersheds” signals the agency’s strategic focus on and commitment to the improvement of fish passage in coastal watersheds. However, that report also acknowledges both the need to further assess coastal watersheds, and the urgency of reviewing barrier data in the context of stream habitat quality and quantity. This proposal provides a rationale and cost-effective methodology for accomplishing both of these goals simultaneously.
15. **Cooperation:** State and federal agencies, as well as numerous project proponents, have all expressed support for and a willingness to cooperate with the grantee in accomplishing the project. The DFG in particular has expressed support in the form of access to files, and the provision of office space for the temporary housing of the subcontractors associated with this undertaking.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:

This data collection and analysis effort targets watersheds within and outside of the coastal zone boundary in an effort to establish historic and current habitat quality and quantity for purposes of anadromous fish restoration. As such, adherence to the Coastal Act, as well as Local Coastal Programs (LCPs), is necessary. Since the proposed project will involve all areas covered by LCPs, and since all LCPs must be certified by the Coastal Commission, it is most essential that the proposed project is consistent with the Coastal Act.

The proposed project will collect baseline data essential to the strategic restoration of coastal watersheds, and the species such as anadromous fish resources that depend upon those watersheds for their survival. The proposed project is therefore consistent with the Coastal Act, Section 30231, which states that “(t)he biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for the protection of human health shall be maintained, and, where feasible, restored through, among other means, minimizing adverse effects of waste water discharges and entrainment, controlling runoff, preventing depletion of groundwater supplies and substantial

interference with surface water flow, encouraging waste water reclamation, maintaining natural vegetation buffer areas that protect riparian habitats, and minimizing alteration of natural streams.”

In addition to this general consistency, many Local Coastal Programs include specific provisions worth considering for further consistency with the proposed project. These specific provisions are listed in detail in Exhibit 1.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

Preparation of the project involves only data gathering, planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions and is thus statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval.